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ABSTRACT

Provision for postsecondary higher education in Wales, the nature of the Welsh system, and future concerns are discussed. The roles of the Welsh Office and the Welsh Joint Education Committee contrast greatly with central organizations in England. There is one university in Wales, comprising seven constituent colleges. Additional institutions in Wales are 6 institutes of higher education, 1 polytechnic, 37 colleges of further and technical education, 1,250 evening institutes, and 9 centers for teacher training. Areas of concern include: designing a strategy of provision for postsecondary education and training; raising the level of courses in further education and the participation rate by 16-19 year olds; and meeting the problems posed by declining industries, unemployment, and demographic patterns. Eleven functions performed by the Welsh Office are identified, including: the planning and management of nonuniversity further and higher education, which includes teacher training, adult education, and youth and community service; the control of advanced further education; policy-making for the supply and training of teachers; and vocational education. The different sectors of further and higher education are also described. (SW)

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THE CURRENT PROVISION FOR FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION IN WALES

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THE CURRENT PROVISION FOR FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION IN WALES

1. INTRODUCTION

It is widely assumed that the provision for further and higher education in Wales is not significantly different from that for England. This is not so: such provision has always reflected a national uniqueness.

Since the transfer of responsibility for all education from the Department of Education to the Welsh Office was completed in 1978, the deviations have become, and are likely to be, greater.

This Paper attempts therefore to review broadly the current provision, to identify the idiosyncratic nature of the Welsh system, and the issues it faces during the coming decade.

Four main themes are clear:

(a) The pattern of change since 1974 which predisposes the system to develop in a particular way.

(b) Designing an overall strategy of provision for post-secondary education and training.

(c) Raising the level of courses in further education and the participation rate by the 16 to 19 year olds.

(d) Meeting the problems posed by declining industries, unemployment, and demographic patterns.

2. CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT

Background

The post-secondary educational needs in Wales are specific. Like other peripheral regions of the United Kingdom, Wales has suffered heavily from the decline of primary industries without a growth in the secondary and tertiary sectors equivalent to England. Unemployment in places is 10% above the national average of 10%. Communications, particularly north —— south, are poor, and rural communities scattered. Hence, much of the provision is by exception, and many institutions would, were a plan implemented based on principles of economic viability, result in contractions or even closures. However, the extraordinary power of local politics in Wales ensures that such exceptions are maintained, though often resulting in the over-protection of "catchment areas" for individual colleges.

The pattern of customers is also different. In Wales, 27% of school leavers (as opposed to 18% in England) leave school with no qualifications. On the other hand, 24% enter full-time education compared with 22%. In 1978 (the latest figures), there were 8,000 full-time

and 5,000 part-time students on advanced further education courses, with 64,000 on non-advanced courses. These figures reflect the predominantly NAFE course structure of Welsh FE. Of the 73% who leave with qualifications, 25% have "A" Levels, 22% "O" Levels. Of the 44,000 school leavers in 1978, 3,300 (8%) went to University, 225 (1.9%) into teacher training, and 10,500 (24%) started further and higher education courses. These figures readjust the view of the high interest in education in Wales, which is confined, in fact, to traditional academic and professional areas. It is no higher than in England as a whole.

The population of the 16+ group will decline from 24.7% of the total population in 1981, to 18.2% in 1991. Since 1973 there has been a 100% increase of students in further and higher education; this rise is projected to continue, although at a slower rate, despite the 6% fall in numbers (Welsh Office, 1979).

How has Wales set about providing for further and higher education?

3. RECENT CHANGES

The story of the changes since 1975 has been told elsewhere (Cantor & Roberts, 1979) but it is pertinent to recapitulate the key changes and, as far as possible, provide up-to-date information.

Wales' response to the DES Circular 7/73, "The Development of Higher Education in the Non-University Sector", coincided with the major reorganisation of local government imposed in 1974 on the Principality.

The merging of the less populated counties and the three-way split of Glamorgan (the most populous), offered an opportunity for the first overall planning of FE and HE in Wales. Broadly, each new county (except Powys) would have an institute of higher education by amalgamating existing institutions; all colleges of education (except for St. Mary's College, Bangor) would be incorporated into these institutions, and there would be a planned redistribution of teacher training and advanced further education courses. Thus, between 1975 and 1977, the 8 new authorities became responsible for 47 (instead of 53) FE and HE institutions, comprising a polytechnic, three national colleges, 6 institutes of higher education, and 37 colleges of technical and further education (See map, Appendix 1).

These major changes, however, did not meet fully the need to formulate a general policy of provision for the 16 to 19 age group as a whole, and, as early as 1976 the Technical Education Committee of the Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC) established a working party to identify the needs. An interim report in 1978 (WJEC 1977/78, 1979/80) suggested those priority areas as the curriculum, organisation and structure, and guidance and counselling. It also focused on the needs for providing vocational training, identifying the misconceptions about the Manpower Services Commission's activities in Wales. The Welsh Office, however, took a less broad view, wishing to examine rather sixth form education (Rees & Smith, 1980). As yet no final plan has been formulated, particularly since the long debates about how devolution in Wales and the

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proposed Education Act of 1979 would affect provision, have delayed decision making.

As opposed to these internally generated changes (largely through the agencies of the WJEC), Wales has also had to respond to the changes wrought by the Technician Education Council, the Business Education Council, the MSC, and the Department of Environment, particularly those changes concerning the nature of courses provided, the curriculum, and the kind of student involved. Some responses have been innovative.

4. CENTRAL ORGANISATION

There are two powerful, central bodies in Wales; the Welsh Office and the WJEC. Their roles and relationships provide the greatest contrast with central organisations in England.

The Welsh Office

In April, 1978, the Secretary of State for Education finally transferred the responsibility for all education in Wales to the Secretary of State for Wales at the Welsh Office in Cardiff. The principal functions transferred in addition to those already in existence since 1970 (mainly concerned with primary and secondary education) were:-

(a) The planning and management of non-university further and higher education including teacher training, adult education and the youth and community service.

(b) Powers with regard to the government of colleges.

(c) The control of advanced further education courses, including courses of initial teacher training, and teachers' inservice training courses.

(d) The compilation of further education building programmes, approval of building projects within those programmes and compulsory purchase orders and other land transactions involving college sites.

(e) Policy for the supply and training of teachers and questions relating to the employment of teachers in maintained schools and colleges in Wales (but not matters relating to teachers' pay, pensions, qualifications, medical fitness for entry, or probation nor to cases of teachers' misconduct).

(f) Vocational education generally and the unified vocational preparation scheme.

(g) Relations with the Manpower Services Commission on further education and training for the 16-19 age group and special measures for the young unemployed.

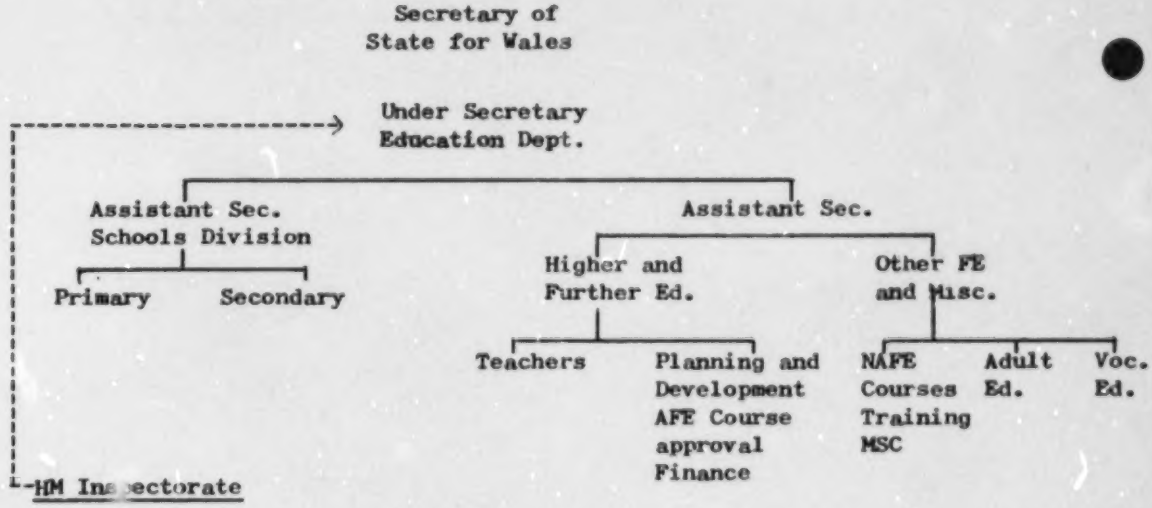
(h) Relations with the Council for National Academic Awards, the Business Education Council, the Technician Education Council, the Industrial Training Boards and the Further Education Curriculum Review and Development Unit.

(i) Grants to Trinity College Carmarthen and to Coleg Harlech, and the making of awards to Welsh-resident students at long term residential colleges of adult education.

(j) Grants to voluntary organisations concerned with adult and continuing education and with the youth and community services.

(k) Policy matters relating to public libraries and the work of the Library Advisory Council (Wales). (These functions are not mentioned in the Order: they are being transferred administratively)(DES, 1978).

To carry out these functions the present organisational structure was established:



Broadly, the Welsh Office performs the DES functions within Wales. Whilst enjoying some autonomy, it has to pursue policies under the national umbrella established by the DES for England and Wales. Nevertheless, it is a regional, central authority, which, since 1978, has had further and higher education firmly represented in it. Hopefully, the Welsh Office can lead in its development, but as a new body it is, to an extent, looking for the most effective role.

Since all the national agencies such as BEC, TEC, the MSC, the Training Boards, etc. operate in Wales as in England, there is a danger that it may become an administrative post-box. However, it is in a strong position to act in some mode as the central body through which rationalisation, strategic planning, and co-ordinating the whole post-secondary sector can occur. The Welsh Office will have to operate jointly, increasingly, with the MSC and the DoE, and particularly with the WJEC. Whether or not the Oakes Report, or a version of it, will materialise, with its recommendation of an Advanced Further Education Council (AFEC) for the whole of Wales, has yet to be seen.

The Welsh Joint Education Committee

Three roles distinguish the WJEC which make is less readily related to English models. First, it is the Welsh CLEA, a consortium of local education authorities performing similar roles to that of CLEA in the United Kingdom as a whole. Secondly, it is an examining body like the AEB or Oxford and Cambridge Boards. Thirdly, it is the Welsh Regional Advisory Council for further education. It is therefore unique in bringing these three functions together and remains a powerful voice in education in Wales. It is frequently criticised for being rigid, authoritarian, traditional, conservative, and over academic in its syllabi and narrow range of subjects. Nevertheless, it has also proved itself to be an innovative body; the changes started in 1975 in the structure of FE and HE in the Principality (and particularly the support given to new IHEs), the decision to accept TEC and BEC and to establish a co-ordinating panel to ensure co-operation between colleges as old courses were phased out (all BEC and TEC submissions were on a consortium basis)*, the encouragement of teaching through the Welsh language, and its proposals for a total pattern of provision for the 16 to 19 age group, all demonstrate this. As would be expected, expertise lies less in the tertiary level, and the WJEC relies heavily on the advice of the FE Inspectorate. Weaknesses are visible at secondary level also. Only recently has the WJEC turned its attention to "the new sixth formers", the non-"A" Level pupils. (Rees & Smith, 1980).

5. HIGHER EDUCATION

The University of Wales

There is one University in Wales, comprising seven constituent colleges, the University College, Aberystwyth (the oldest); University College of North Wales, Bangor; the University College, Cardiff; the University of Wales Institute of Science and Technology (also in Cardiff and which it is currently being proposed to amalgamate with University College, Cardiff); University College, Swansea; the Welsh National School of Medicine (Cardiff); and St. David's College, Lampeter (previously a theological college).

The University of Wales has 20,000 students and is a senior powerful voice in Welsh educational matters, if sometimes also criticised for being conservative and protective. It has, for example, a monopoly in Wales as far as further education is concerned, since the only teacher qualification courses for FE are run by the Education Department at Cardiff. In some ways ahead of its time (for example the systems approach to training is emphasised), in other ways it has failed to generate the innovative lead it might have. Similarly, the University has not played a particularly significant role in awarding and validating degree courses in other institutions, though some still turn to the University rather than CNAA as the apogee of academic excellence. Naturally, the University of Wales is seen as an expression of Wales, its culture, and Language, and there is a noticeable polarisation of fro Cymru ("real Wales") in Aberystwyth and Bangor and a resistance to the increasing number of students who come from outside Wales. The current concept of "first and second league" universities, linked to the concept of centres of excellence, no doubt will raise cries of

* See for example, TEC NEWS, TEC-A wider viewpoint, No.13, July 1979.

anguish if the University of Wales were placed anywhere other than in the first league, particularly since its origins go back to the 1890s.

National Colleges

An additional feature is that of the National Colleges of Wales. At Aberystwyth are the Welsh Agricultural College and the College of Librarianship of Wales, both with international reputations. In Cardiff is the Welsh College of Music and Drama with which the recently established Welsh National Theatre Company and its Youth counterpart are closely connected.

6. INSTITUTES OF HIGHER EDUCATION

There are six Institutes of Higher Education in Wales. The North East Wales IHE was formed by amalgamating two colleges in Wrexham (one, Cartrefle, a college of education) and Kelsterston College at Connah's Quay. At Newport, the Gwent College of HE joined several Newport colleges with the teacher training college at Caerleon. The South Glamorgan IHE at Cardiff gathered together a number of colleges of technology, art, teacher training and marine navigation and technology. While in West Glamorgan a similar amalgamation occurred in Swansea. In North Wales, Bangor Normal College, and in West Wales, Trinity College, Carmarthen (both formally colleges of education) retained their individual state by becoming diversified IHEs; Trinity with 500 students must be the smallest in the UK and is an associate college of the University of Wales School of Education. The IHEs account for some 30,000 full and part-time students. However, in each Institute the proportion of NAFE to AFE is high; on average only 30% to 40% of the work can be classified as AFE. To date, the IHEs have remained in existence, and in some cases thrived, because they meet local student needs by their particular blends of courses, and partly by the rule of exception. Were, for example, the NEWIHE to close, a huge area would remain with no HE and FE provision. Also, vociferous local interests fight strongly for their existence and development; the traditional Cardiff-Swansea-Newport rivalry extends beyond the rugby field. On the surface it would seem that their geographical situation will ensure their existence, but whether as IHE in the strict sense of the word (and the DES did remind Welsh authorities of the definition some years ago only to be told it was a local matter), and in view of the projected removal from local to central government IHE financing, the position of Welsh IHEs may be made even more difficult, problems not uncommon to those faced by counterparts in England. The Scottish Central Institutions seem to be better placed.

Polytechnics

There is one Polytechnic of Wales, maintained, with some difficulty, by the Mid Glamorgan authority at Treforest. Formed in 1974, despite difficulties of finance, and the shortage of students due to competition in an area where two thirds of the population of Wales live, it has managed to both diversify and concentrate on particular areas of excellence. It was dealt a blow from which it really never recovered

by the loss of 800 students when, after its amalgamation with the Polytechnic, Barry College of Education was closed (the site is up for sale) as part of the overall plan for providing teacher training in Wales. As the Regional Management Centre for Wales, it virtually does not exist. There is at present no Head of the RMC and its future remains obscure. There are several other institutions nearby which would happily take over that role. Indeed, RMC activity in Wales is largely provided by those Centres at Bristol and Preston.

7. FURTHER EDUCATION

Welsh authorities maintain 37 colleges of further and technical education. The distinction in title and function is still maintained in some areas. For example, the college at Ammanford in West Wales is almost entirely dominated by mining and allied engineering, and that at Carmarthen is called the "Technical and Agricultural College". Llanelly, Pembroke, Merthyr Tydfil, Pontypridd, Neath, Llandrillo and Bangor are all "technical colleges". On the other hand Bridgend and Rumney (Cardiff) call themselves "Colleges of Technology".

A second notable distinctiveness is the range of size. There are several colleges with 200 or fewer students: Llysfasi College of Agriculture (85FT); Dyfed College of Art (180 FT); Welsh College of Horticulture at Mold (130 FT); Usk College of Agriculture (120 FT); Coleg Meirionnydd (Dolgellau) (190FT); and finally the Mid Glamorgan College of Agriculture and Horticulture (40 FT), the smallest. The largest, Swansea, has 1,400 FT students, while Bridgend and Pontypridd have around 600 FT. The remaining Colleges average about 250 FT students. A glance at the map will explain these variations. These figures will change as current shifts to tertiary colleges take place. For example, Gwent has two large tertiary colleges, the first at Crosskeys, the second at Pontypool , and West Glamorgan is changing to a tertiary college system at Neath (in 1982) and Port Talbot (1983). A third variant from English practice lies in staffing and organisation. In many Welsh colleges the Vice-Principal is also Head of a Department, frequently Engineering. The CAO appears to have a low profile (titles range from clerical officer to Registrar) and on most Governing Bodies the Chief Education Officer or the Area Education Officer are members. Hierarchy is particularly close to Welsh hearts and is reflected in the organisations of most colleges; matrices are conspicuous by their absence.

Finally, the most remarkable feature of FE in Wales is the large proportion of NAFE. Only 18 of the "FE colleges" have more advanced work than the "technical colleges" in the courses provided. With an 18% take-up rate in FE it would suggest that there is a need both to improve that take-up rate and the level of courses. In a region where 71% of school leavers (traditionally), take employment, the recent high rise in unemployment and the loss of traditional apprenticeships in the basic industries in the south, poses FE special problems. So far the response to youth unemployment has been made by the MSC, the CBI and TUC in Wales, and by some colleges on their own initiatives (for example, the factory owned and run by Merthyr Tydfil College), but in a haphazard and unco-ordinated manner. FE's role is not clear.(Rees & Smith, 1980).

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Adult Education and Miscellaneous Provision

There are some 1,250 Evening Institutes in Wales catering for well over 100,000 students (10% of whom, strangely, are under 18). Additional provision is made by the various Extra-Mural Departments of the University, the WEA, and other agencies.

Agricultural education and training is provided by seven colleges, although in 1981 one in Dyfed will become a Department of Aberystwyth College of FE.

There are also three special colleges in Wales. One, The Hill College at Abergavenny is a short-term residential college catering for non-vocational education, the other, Coleg Harlech is an open, long-term residential college financed directly by the DES, with special interests in providing mature students with "second chance" education, many of whom go on to take degrees.

In South Glamorgan is the United World College of the Atlantic, one of three in the world, which is essentially an international sixth form college.

Provision of education in Her Majesty's Prisons is in the usually tri-partite form, the Home Office (not the Welsh Office), the LEA, and the local FE College. The majority of the work is concentrated at Usk, Cardiff, and Swansea.

Teacher Training

Teacher training, a long-established higher education activity in Wales has been dramatically cut by national policy. All teacher training courses are operating at 50% or less of possible capacity of 4,500 in nine centres (NEWIHE, SGIHE, IHE Gwent, Trinity College, and 4 major colleges, the University of Wales, Normal College, Bangor. In 1978, for example, only 225 students entered training and most centres, particularly the IHEs, have diversified the range to degree courses they offer to compensate. Initial teacher training is generally regarded to be of a lower quality than in England, a criticism which reflects on the University of Wales which validates all B.Ed. courses (the only CNAA validated was at Barry, which closed in 1979). Trinity College chose to join the IHE circuit rather than remain as a free-standing voluntary college although it is partially supported by DES and the Welsh church grants, offering at present one B.Ed. and Dip.HE courses.

8. SOME KEY ISSUES FACING FE AND HE

The controversies discussed by Cantor and Roberts (1979) largely no longer rage since neither the Welsh Assembly nor the proposed Education Act of 1978 came into being. Since much time and energy were taken up with this debate, Wales now faces a number of immediate practical problems which require a different approach to their solution. The major problem is that of how to rationalise the existing system. The financial powers of the WJEC (it administers a separate RSG and AFE

Pool) and its three roles make it the obvious centre for such rationalisation and the development of a co-ordinated plan for all post 16 education. In order for this to happen LEAs will have to take on modified roles, losing some of their local powers and joining in more co-operative ventures than hitherto. Since the LEAs find HE a particular burden it would seem a reasonable exchange despite the loss of cash flow and the powers to manipulate local provision. Similarly, it could serve as the agency to co-ordinate the various bodies involved in FE which is a particular problem, and one not peculiar to Wales. Wales is in a position similar to Sweden, and the Swedish model of a National Board might be the best to adopt. The second issue concerns the special needs geographically of Wales in considering any overall plan. Exceptions will have to exist as already pointed out. In geographically smaller areas, also the most populous, a move to Tertiary Colleges would be advantageous in rationalising and broadening the educational opportunities already available. In other areas, larger and less populous a judicious mixture of FE, HE, and Sixth Form institutions might be a more effective solution. In rural areas Community Colleges, such as that presently being built in Newtown, might meet needs better, while the development of Dolgellau since 1971 demonstrates how a small college(for example, all students get work experience while on courses) can develop in a particular difficult geographical area.

The third major issue is that of increasing participation by the post 16 age group, the raising of educational achievement standards generally, and the judicious encouragement of AFE work whilst avoiding any academic drift where NAFE is a primary need. Implicit in this problem is the need to develop more flexible curricular and teaching methods to match the needs and abilities of a widening band of ability range of students turning to FE and HE in Wales.

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HIGHER AND FURTHER EDUCATION

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University College
Institute of Higher and Further Education
Polytechnic
College of Further Education
College of Technology and Technical College
College of Agriculture and Horticulture
College of Art
Coleg Harlech and the World College of the Atlantic
College of Librarianship
Welsh College of Music and Drama
The North East Wales Institute of Higher and Further Education has facilities at Wrexham and Connah's Quay
The Polytechnic of Wales has facilities at Treforest and Barry
The Pembrokeshire Technical College has facilities at Haverfordwest and Haverfordwest
GWYNEDD
CLWYD
POWYS
DYFED
WEST GLAMORGAN
MID GLAMORGAN
SOUTH GLAMORGAN
GWENT

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